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ABSTRACT

The Center for Educational Leadership was established in New York City in 1984 to meet the objective of institutionalizing the effective leadership and staff development practices necessary to sustain school improvement. It is a catalyst and a facilitator which enables educational leaders to apply their instructional and management expertise throughout school districts as well as in individual schools. Based on knowledge learned from school improvement projects, this center uses the participation of a cross-section of educational leaders to develop its programs. Current program strategies are the following: (1) hands-on workshops for school leaders; (2) seminars and conferences for administrators, teachers, and parent leaders; (3) interest groups focusing on specific educational issues and professional development; (4) on-site consultation in schools to enhance the application of new knowledge and practices learned at the center; (5) site visits to exemplary programs; (6) resource linkages between schools and other organizations; (7) information dissemination through its own library; and (8) research, development, and policy formation. Expected outcomes of the center are excitement about real achievement, capacity building, new points of emphasis for schools, and positive influences on educational policy. (VM)

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THE CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

PROJECT BASICS INFORMATION PACKAGE

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SUSTAINING INNOVATIONS: ESTABLISHING THE CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

July, 1986

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Background

Public schools throughout the nation have recently been under intense pressure to improve standards of instruction and raise academic performance. New projects, often representing the "latest innovations," are entering and leaving schools constantly. As a result, school staff have become increasingly resistant to the innovations represented by new projects, mandates and structures imposed upon them by external sources. Even when school staff elect to be partners in new projects, stiff resistance at points in the implementation stage is very common.

The culture of schools contributes to such resistance. Schools, like other complex institutions, tend to be organized rigidly with a strong predilection towards long standing practices which may or may not be effective. When schools implement new instructional and managerial practices, staff often resist by asking: Where will we get the time to do this given all the other things we must continue? Many adapt a "wait and see" attitude believing that as the political interest driving change shifts its attention, resources for implementing new programs will dry up.

The process of educational change demands complex organizational analysis and broad collaboration by all educators, two difficult tasks that school professionals are not often trained to perform. However, drawing upon nearly two decades of involvement in the New York City public schools, the New York Urban Coalition has developed a model of school change that builds such capacity in schools and has helped fertilize the soil for important innovation in many schools. The Center for Educational Leadership was established in 1984 as an outgrowth of this work and represents a unique partnership between the Coalition, the Board of Education and the Mayor's Office to meet the objective of institutionalizing the effective leadership and staff development practices necessary to sustain school improvement.

Mission

The Center for Educational Leadership's mission is to support the creation of "effective" schools that promote excellence through the development of the school system's capacity to train and maintain capable leaders at all levels who are well acquainted with innovative instructional and management practices.

The Center sees itself as a catalyst and facilitator which enables educational leaders from around the City to bring together and apply their expertise for school improvement in individual schools, across districts, and throughout the larger school system.

The Center is being developed as an institution, not a project. Educators view projects as transitory, without long term influence. The Center's mission is to build a sense of structural "readiness" for the content-laden change in practices that are necessary for urban educators to sustain improvement over a long period of time.

When Ronald Edmonds and his associates launched the "effective schools" movement in the late 1970's, they defined an effective school as one in which significant distinctions among its various racial, ethnic and social class groups with respect to the acquisition of basic skills should not be apparent. Edmonds pushed to the consciousness of educators and the public the statement that "all children can learn." In an effective school all children acquire the basic skills and display essential competencies.

Two projects which Edmonds promoted in New York City, the Local School Development Project (LSDP), which was operated by the New York Urban Coalition, and the School Improvement Project (SIP), operated by the Board of Education received wide attention from educators and media across the nation from 1980 through 1984. The two projects reported dramatic improvements in test scores in reading and mathematics. In addition, significant positive changes in school climate were achieved.

In 1983, the leaders of the Local School Development Project joined with leaders of the school system to design the Center for Educational Leadership. The Center was conceived as the next step in the evolutionary process of school reform. It was to incorporate the knowledge learned from LSDP, SIP and other school improvement projects from around the country in an institution where educational leaders from across the city could convene, plan and implement necessary school changes on a system-wide basis. During their most intense level of activities, LSDP and SIP were only active in approximately 70 schools in a New York City school population of nearly 1,000. The Center was founded to extend school improvement practices and establish relationships in other districts and schools while maintaining the momentum already in place in participating schools and districts.

The Program Development Committee

In 1984, thirty individuals representing thirteen community school districts, two teacher training colleges, the New York City Board of Education's Office of the Chancellor, Division of High Schools, Division of Curriculum and Instruction and the New York Urban Coalition, came together to form the Program Development Committee (PDC) of the Center for Educational Leadership. The Program Development Committee was established to help design the various Center programs.

PDC affords the Center an opportunity to have the knowledge and expertise of a cross-section of educational leaders influence the conceptualization and implementation of its programs. By having this "grassroots" participation in program design, the Center's activities are strengthened and linkages are established to facilitate implementation back in the districts and schools which Program Development Committee members represent.

This strategy of "grassroots" involvement in program design is strikingly atypical from the strategy of developing projects without input from the likely implementors or their representatives. The PDC members are significant "gatekeepers" in their respective educational communities. Through their involvement in program design they are more likely to serve as "gate busters" who promote the ideas of programs among their peers and colleagues and break resistance to innovation.

To date, the PDC has participated in the conceptualization of:

(1) The design of the Center's overall conceptual framework out of which all projects and activities emerge;

(2) The design of Project Basics, a staff development and leadership training dropout prevention program operating in 21 junior and senior high schools serving approximately 25,000 students;

(3) The design of the Scientific Literacy Improvement Project, (SLIP) a curriculum improvement and leadership training program geared to better elementary school student mastery of science and technology. SLIP will be implemented in ten schools beginning September 1986.

(4) The design of leadership training and staff development seminars for a broad cross section of New York City education professionals.

The Program Development Committee was also a major participant in the design of the Center's physical facilities--10,500 sq.ft. of conference and resource rooms and offices in lower Manhattan. Significant attention was given to the design of the Center because most of the space available for training educators in New York City is of extremely poor quality. The typically unattractive, confining environments are seen by educators as an obstacle to the accomplishment of training objectives, in much the same ways that poor classroom environments inhibit teaching and learning. In December, 1985 the Center opened its doors in a completely renovated "state of the art" training facility.

Current Program Strategies

The major program strategies of the Center are:

(1) Workshops - The Center offers school leaders a series of "hands on" workshops to enhance their understanding and application of the theories and practices of leadership, staff development, and curriculum and instruction improvement. All workshops are part of a series. The Center assidiously avoids "one-shot" experiences that are not followed up in the school itself.

(2) Seminars and Conferences - The Center brings together noted practitioners and researchers from within the City and around the nation for presentations to New York City administrators, teachers and parent leaders.

(3) Networks - Opportunities are provided for administrators, teachers and others to form interest groups focusing on specific educational issues and their own professional development.

(4) On-site Consultation - Schools and districts which participate in Center sponsored projects are provided consultation at the school level to enhance the application in schools of new knowledge and practices presented in workshops, seminars and conferences.

(5) Site-visits - Educational leaders are given opportunities to visit and observe exemplary programs and practices in other schools and institutions. Resources are set aside to facilitate such valuable networking in a formal way.

(6) Resource linkages - The Center identifies staff development programs and instructional techniques that have been developed in universities and businesses and provides a linkage mechanism to schools. Outside organizations have much to share with schools, the Center seeks to open schools to much broader contact with the community at large.

(7) Information dissemination - The Center disseminates information about existing exemplary programs through meetings, conferences and workshops. In addition, the Center is developing a Leadership Training and Staff Development Library with periodicals, books, videotapes, audiotapes, films and other media based on its own work and the work of others around the nation.

(8) Research, Development and Policy Formation - Through links established between researchers and evaluators of our programs and other school improvement programs around the country, the Center will disseminate reports that document successful practices. Drawing upon the wealth of knowledge shared by practitioners participating in Center programs, a policy center will organize educational forums and offer advice to policymakers and advocates on appropriate reform steps.

This comprehensive set of strategies will ultimately bring about significant changes in the professional development of educational leaders and in the impact that practitioners have on the improvement of school life. The programs which employ these strategies are designed to be practical, flexible and participatory. In order for innovative practices to take hold, school leaders must have a strong sense of ownership and input into the decision-making process.

Expected Outcomes

Program Development Committee members originally conceived the Center as a place for "educational leaders to experiment without penalty," or to "try new innovations without having the watchful eyes of superiors over our shoulders." They wanted the Center to be free of the bureaucratic and political constraints of the Board of Education and the universities so that the "real needs of children and educational leaders could be addressed." Of course, experimentation without penalty is not a fully realistic goal. Rather than focusing on a natural tendency to resist penalties and mandates, the Center encourages educational leaders to accent the positive expectations they can develop for children.

If school leaders develop the knowledge and skill to achieve those expectations, then penalties and mandates will seem less significant. Excitement about real "achievement" rather than "accountability" will then become the focus of public and political attention.

A major goal of all Center programs is capacity building. The idea is to teach school leaders to fish, not to give them a fish. This translates into school leaders' significant involvement in all phases of the change process from mobilization to implementation to institutionalization. It is the aim of the Center to help school leaders develop program development, implementation and assessment skills during their association with the Center. The Center's work will be deemed successful at the point where schools begin to initiate and sustain their own leadership training, staff development and school improvement efforts.

Another projected outcome of the Center's efforts is the introduction of essential new points of emphasis in the dialogue about necessary school improvements. One such emphasis includes a focus on a broader range of competencies which inner city children need in order to become more socially, academically and economically adept in an increasingly demanding world. An emphasis on improved understanding of scientific and technological knowledge is vital to the future development of our City's children.

Finally, we intend to influence educational policy as researchers, practitioners and policymakers jointly examine challenging issues and promising practices. The Center will act as a hub for the development of the best educational thinkers and the dissemination of their ideas. Thus, the activities and practical program and policy applications which are generated will reach far beyond individual schools and districts.

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